DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 186 905 CS 205 537

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TITLE Practical Application of Reading Theory and Technique to Classroom Composition.
PUB DATE Mar 80
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (31st, Washington, DC, March 13-15, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cloze Procedure; Higher Education; *Interdisciplinary Approach; *Reading Instruction; Secondary Education; Teaching Methods; *Writing (Composition); *Writing Exercises; *Writing Instruction

ABSTRACT

Integrating reading theory and instructional techniques into the composition classroom helps students improve both their reading and writing skills. Students should be evaluated early by combining diagnostic samples of their reading and writing to determine their ability to recognize organizational relationships and their facility with reading strategies. One of the most practical and easily integrated reading techniques is the cloze procedure, a method that systematically deletes words in written passages, requiring the reader to fill in gaps to make the message whole again. The three basic kinds of cloze exercises are the concept related, content related, and structural. The most useful to the writing teacher is the structural exercise that students can use to check how well they organize and develop ideas, how smoothly they write, how closely they connect ideas, and how well their papers pass the requirements of "predictability" essential in good, clear writing. (Appended are a selected bibliography on reading and the writing teacher, instructions for developing cloze exercises, and samples from student essays.) (AEA)

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Practical Application of Reading Theory and Technique to Classroom Composition

Mary F. Hayes

It seems to me that one of the most appropriate metaphors for the writing teacher today is that of court jester. Faced with myriad sets of caps and bells--we're hard put to know which one to don at which moment. We all agree on almost nothing except that we want our students to be better writers, actively involved in the most personal of all processes, and we want them to find the agonizing enjoyment and frustrating satisfaction in that process that we find. So to that end, we shake our sentence-combining bells or don our prewriting caps and wade into action. Today, I'm here to present you with yet another set of bells and cap--and the longer I teach writing, the more I am convicned that this set deserves a prominent place in our pedagogical wardrobe.

I want to suggest some of the practical ways we can begin to use that vast store of sister knowledge--reading theory and technique in our writing classrooms. As you know, these primers are designed for teachers who have no formal background in theory but are interested in combining reading and writing instruction. In fact, none of us on the panel is a reading specialist, although we have had some training in reading. We, like you, are writing teachers who seek new and better ways to teach our students.

You don't have to be a reading specialist to know that reading and writing skills are interrelated. Intuitively, we all recognized the close relationship long before Mina Shaughnessy, among others suggested that the students who read the least are the weakest writers.

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What you might not know , however, is that over the last fifteen years or so, several studies have provided empirical evidence supporting what we knew all along. These studies indicate that not only is there a close relationship in the thought processes of the reader and the writer, but that practice in one skill helps in the other. Most studies in reading are conducted in grades k-12, but that doesn't make their findings any less intriguing for us. For instance, most recent research indicates a high correlation between syntactic skills in writing and reading. The work in miscue analysis, discussed by Chris and Ed, has led researchers to explore how systems of syntax, semantics, and graphophonemics underlie general language ability. Studies by Loban, Carroll, Takahashi and Kuntz (all listed in your bibliography) indicate that students' knowledge of syntax and their sophistication in creating their own syntactic structures are basically the same in both reading and writing. Arthur Applebee and James Squire report that high school English Teachers believe that the composition courses not the literature courses are responsible for their students' increased reading time--in both personal and required reading. Rosemary Wolfe has shown a correlation between reading and writing vocabulary, while Theoné Hughes has found that not only students' writing but their reading improved when they had intensive training in sentence-combining. And finally, one study done at the college level by Walter Lazdowski at New Mexico State University involved a careful study of writing samples from high school and college level students. From these samples, he developed a highly accurate system by which one could predict reading levels from a writing sample.

Once we accept that integrating reading instruction into our classes will help our students improve both their reading and writing skills, we're faced with that sense of confusion so overwhelming in any grand undertaking-how do we go about it? My first warning, is that you--that all of us-must be aware of what we can do and what we are just not qualified to do or what we just don't have time to do

in a traditional classroom. You should begin by familiarizing yourself with what facilities and personnel your school has for your students. In many universities, the writing lab employs reading specialists who can accurately assess your student's individual reading levels and provide individualized instruction. In other schools, you need to consult with your education department--or if you're one of the lucky ones, you have the services of a reading clinic right on campus. All of those alternatives are important, and, of course, you should be aware that they exist and know what they offer, but most of us, faced with anywhere from one to five composition courses per semester, don't have the expertise or time for the kind of in-depth testing and exact assessment of such clinicians.

One way we can begin to use reading and writing in our classes is by combining the typical diagnostic sample of writing with a diagnostic sample of reading. Since standardized reading tests are most concerned with percentages, scores, and levels of reading, they are probably not as helpful to us as an evaluation that 1) provides us with an indication of our students' general ability to read and comprehend the class assigned rhetoric or reader, 2) an assessment of how our students arrive at conclusions and perceive organizational structure in writing, 3) and finally an exercise that suggests the links in reading and writing to our students. You can create such a reading/writing evaluation for your class, one that they can take during a fifty minute session in lieu of the usual diagnostic essay or writing sample. You should select a passage from the class reader, if one is assigned, or you might try a fable if one is not. You need to keep the passage short enough (approx. 500 words) so that the student can read it and write about it within the hour. Create a few basic comprehension questions from the passage, that can be answered briefly. Have students explain the major action, the central issue or attitudes expressed in the passage. After the comprehension questions, have the students write a paragraph in which they restate the major idea or central point

of the passage and explain as clearly and fully as possible how the writer organizes his or her thoughts. You need to give them full and detailed instructions, explaining exactly what you want, because such an exercise will be new to many of them. An interesting twist on this classic teacher-created comprehension check is suggested by Larry Heller in the Oct., 1978 English Journal. He has his students read a passage, answer basic comprehension questions of his own devising, and then write the procedures they used to extract meaning from what they read. He asks them to recall in sequence the thoughts, feelings, and attitudes that occurred to them, while reading. Such a diagnosis is especially useful as you help the students become conscious of how a reader internalizes what he or she reads thus directing how they write.

Although seemingly simple enough, such a reading/writing evaluation early in the course enables you to discover a number of your students' abilities and specialized skills in both writing and reading. From such an evaluation, you obtain a preliminary sample of writing as well as a look at your students' ability to recognize organizational relationships within writing even before you demonstrate such principles as unity, coherence (or momentum) and focus. From a reading standpoint, you receive an indication of the students' facility with reading strategies--where and how well they look for information on a page, how well they sort, store, and restate ideas, and how well they analyze for a central message. From such an evaluation, you can make the same kinds of judgements you did earlier from writing samples, but you also have quite a bit of information about their reading ability as well.

Another one of the most helpful, practical reading techniques and one most easily integrated into writing instruction is the CLOZE procedure technique or exercise. CLOZE procedure has been in use by reading specialists since 1953 when W. L. Taylor devised the system to test comprehension and intelligence quotients in military personnel. CLOZE, short for closure is a method which systematically

deletes words in written passages, requiring that the reader fill in the gaps to make the message whole again. The exercises have been used primarily to assess readability of a text or measure a reader's comprehension; however, recently reading teachers have begun to experiment with the use of CLOZE for instructional purposes of all kinds. Since its effectiveness for instructional purposes is just beginning to be recognized among reading teachers, writing teachers haven't much widespread understanding of the techniques, but preliminary indications are that CLOZE is a flexible, genuinely beneficial tool for teaching writing as well as increasing reading skill.

An underlying assumption of the CLOZE procedure is that filling deleted words in a written text is related to the way in which readers process language when they read. In the 1970's Smith and Hochberg conducted research that suggests that a reader follows a process of sampling, predicting, and testing and that the reader's familiarity with the topic increases the ability to gain information from what is read by more successful predictions. Readers must use not only their eyes to perceive and "decode" a recorded message, but use knowledge of the language and previous experience with the content of the material to anticipate and reconstruct meaning. Therefore, much of a reader's ability to gain new knowledge from what he or she reads depends on knowledge already possessed. A reader's knowledge of phonology (the sound system, how words are spelled), syntax (their relationship with other words in the sentence) and semantics (the meaning) assists the reader in making sense out of what is read. CLOZE procedure exercises are based then on the same assumptions made in miscue analysis of how the reader adopts certain cuing systems to understand what he or she reads, drawing on these three basic systems (graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic). When readers confront a text from which words are ommitted, they will use all three cuing systems as they press for meaning, for understanding, as they attempt to fill in the blanks.

Consistent practice in CLOZE exercises has been effective in several areas:

1) First of all, and possibly least interesting to us, CLOZE exercises are simple determiners of readability of texts or materials for a given reading level. If this area interests you--perhaps you'd like to test the reading levels of your own textbooks--I've provided bibliography that will help you in such an undertaking.

2) CLOZE exercises have been found to be effective tests for comprehension--just as effective, in fact, as traditional or standardized comprehension tests. Moreover, they are free from kinds of tester bias typical in such tests. CLOZE helps determine comprehension so well because it so closely resembles the mental processes that the psycholinguists suggest govern comprehension; the reader uses the text to make inferences about what the passage means and how it is structured, makes predictions about the deleted words, and then is able to test and correct those predictions using the information following the deleted words.

3) Not only do the exercises help test comprehension, they allow the students to practice and build comprehension skills as they use the exercises--learning to formulate tests and confirm hypotheses as they read.

4) The exercises force readers of all levels to deal with grammar and meaning.

At the end of the bibliography, you'll find steps for creating your own CLOZE exercises and 2 samples taken directly from 2 former students' essays.

Three basic kinds of CLOZE exercises suggest the many possibilities they offer us as writing teachers. Concept related exercises have been used most often to stress reading in content areas, because they emphasize concept formation, refinement, or extension. In such concept related exercises, key terms or technical words are deleted and the reader is forced to manipuate mentally the basic ideas presented in the material. Content related exercises, the most common for building skills in comprehension, allow a reader to identify specific ideas and information

that is most important in the content of a passage. A teacher can prepare such an exercise by carefully deleting key ideas, phrases, even sentences that state the major ideas--usually carried in lexical items, the nouns, verbs, adj, and adverbs of traditional grammar. After the students have filled in the passage, they can discuss what the major ideas are and how the writer conveys and explains them. Such a process is particularly helpful for the teacher who seeks to individualize instruction based on content related disciplines. Writing teachers can easily turn content CLOZE exercises into stylistic exercises and discuss diction level, connotation and denotation in writing, by fully discussing students' choices and the array of synonyms available.

The kind of CLOZE exercise I've found the most useful has been the Structural exercise which allows an insight into and discussion of how a writer organizes and developes ideas--whether around traditional or nontraditional patterns or modes. Such exercises can be easily used to introduce students to the various rhetorical modes or organizational patterns and aid students in becoming much more sophisticated in sorting and storing information that they read. For instance, if you are teaching cause/effect, comparison/contrast, or different structural forms of argument, you can create exercises which emphasize key transitions, or repetitive phrases, peculiar to that organizational pattern. In fact, I've used CLOZE exercises that combine a deletion of content and organizational terms to teach unity, momentum and focus--in passages on those terms. As they reconstruct the passages, students become aware of and begin to internalize the varying structural patterns keyed by transitions, repetitive terms or major ideas.

You can come up with many variations of CLOZE to help you teach diction, tense, idiomatic usage, even function words; however, many of us believe more and more that students need much less exposure to models of other people's writing and much more time writing. CLOZE exercises are most helpful to students in composition classes, I believe, for what they reveal to our students about their

own writing, how smoothly they write, how closely they connect ideas, and how well their papers pass the requirements of "predictability" essential in good, clear writing. To this end, we can help them by showing them how they can easily put their essays through CLOZE procedure proofreading and revision. The first few examples are always a revelation to them as they discover what seemed so clear and understandable the night before could present such a snarled labyrinth as they attempt to reconstruct their work. Students can work alone or in groups, on their own papers or on others, following the simple steps in preparing their exercises and then using them. A typical reaction to such a new form of revision came from one student last semester when he told me that he would write his essays, then perform CLOZE on them to see what he had written--clearly the aim of revision--to resee one's writing.

A quick look around at this conference, at the number of journals in our field, at all those techniques and ideas that we've been "meaning to try when we get a chance" suggests that one set of cap and bells is no longer sufficient for the writing teacher. Although we aren't reading specialists, we owe it to our students, ourselves, and to our belief that teaching critical reading is an important ancillary purpose in our classrooms to familiarize ourselves with the techniques and theories of reading instruction, because that particular set of cap and bells has lain in the writing teacher's truck too long.

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CREATING CLOZE PROCEDURE EXERCISES

The basic procedure for creating CLOZE exercises is simple, and the pattern can be varied to suit a teacher's special needs or interests.

1) Select a passage of more than 250 words. Although any written material is suitable, you should begin with exercises based on material familiar to the students.

2) Type the passage, leaving the first and last sentence intact. Choose any one of the first 5 words in the second sentence and replace it with a blank 15 spaces long. After the first blank, replace every fifth word until you have deleted at least 50 words. (A common variation is to delete fewer words--every tenth or twelth. Another common variation in beginning instruction is to provide the first letter of each deleted word as an additional cue for beginning readers who make use of initial sounds to decode words.)

3) Although CLOZE exercises used for diagnostic purposes are carefully timed, I do not usually limit the time students have to complete the exercises.

If you are interested in using CLOZE for testing readability of your textbooks or for determining your students' reading levels, you should consult the bibliography attached here. Since I use CLOZE exercises for instructional purposes primarily, I don't include percentage tables and readability quotients in my presentation. The bibliography provides for readers with varying levels of expertise.

Example 1: CLOZE Procedure Exercise

Decade after decade, Superman and Batman have thrilled millions of comic book and hero lovers, children as well as adults. (1)_____, with h[illegible] Kryptonic powers, (2)_____ Batman, with his great (3)_____ and ingenuity, have always (4)_____ evildoers for the safety (5)_____ the people. Although each (6)_____ defeats the villain (7)_____ a different way, there (8)_____ attire, strategy, and personalities (9)_____ surprisingly similar.

The first (10)_____ of diaster see Superman (11)_____ through the air arrayed (12)_____ a red and blue (13)_____ outfit, his cape flowing (14)_____. Upon his brawyn chest (15)_____ a large letter "S." (16)_____ would hardly suspect that (17)_____ everyday situations, this handsome, (18)_____ hero is Clark Kent, (19)_____ shy, awkward newspaper reporter. (20)_____ Superman, Batman also sports (21)_____ and a cape when (22)_____ is called for duty. (23)_____, to disguise him further, (24)_____ dons a totally black (24)_____, consisting of bat mask, (25)_____ ears, bat shoes, and (26)_____ belt.

When the bat (27)_____ rings trouble, Batman, along (28)_____ his sidekick Robin, leaps (29)_____ start up the sleek (30)_____. Superman, on the other (31)_____, rushes to the nearest (32)_____ booth to change into (33)_____ inconquerable superhero! Surrounded by (34)_____, the superheroes display various (35)_____. Batman fights criminals with (36)_____ devices translated as "soinks" "(37)_____," "pows" and "wham-o's"! With (38)_____ aid of his bat (39)_____, he is successful in (40)_____ every sticky situation. Superman, (41)_____ inherited Krypton's power of (42)_____, flight, and x-ray vision, (43)_____ by Kryptonite, (44)_____ radioactive, gaseous element. Even (45)_____ he is affected however, he manages to

escape the (46)_____ element, often by wooing (47)_____ soft-hearted villainess.

Women also (48)_____ an important role in (49)_____ the superheroes' common characteristics. (50)_____ Superman and Batman are (51)_____ to the opposite sex, (52)_____ the opposite sex is (53)_____ to them. Hidden by (54)_____ eyeglasses, working as a (55)_____, Clark Kent hardly impresses (56)_____ heartthrob, Lois Lane. But (57)_____ the ordinary Clark (58)_____ becomes Superman, thousands of (59)_____ swoon at the sight (60)_____ his muscular physique. As (61)_____ City's philanthropist, the handsome (62)_____ has no trouble interesting (63)_____ city's women, let alone (64)_____, the Commissioner's daughter.

When (65)_____ comes to combatting evildoers, (66)_____ talents of both Superman (67)_____ Batman prevail. For as (68)_____ as the world is (70)_____ by gangsters such as "(71)_____ Luther" and the "Fiddler," (72)_____ will be a constant (73)_____ for superheroes. Children will (74)_____ to watch Saturday morning (75)_____, with cereal bowls in (76)_____ and towel capes (77)_____ their necks. Teens and (78)_____ will continue to flock (79)_____ comic book stands and (80)_____ to corner theatres to (81)_____ for their favorite heroes. And in every book and every show the final outcome will be the same--the villains lose everything, while the hero will save the day.

EXAMPLE NUMBER 2:
CLOZE PROCEDURE EXERCISE

Example 2 offers a clear contrast to Example 1.

Regardless of where an individual grows up, he or she will be susceptible to the teachings of his or her location. _____ beliefs and actions will _____ the results of his _____ status, along with his _____, national, and international pressures. _____ person will always be _____ by what his society _____ to offer, and if _____ wishes, he will eventually _____ to some of its _____ for survival. Differences in _____ individual's development exist _____ all areas of countries. _____ person growing up in a _____ area opposed to one _____ up in an urban _____, has different social, environmental, _____ cultural conditions.

Occupational differences _____ a contrast in social _____. An individual being raised _____ a farm in the _____ would be in a _____ social class in his _____, because the livelihood of _____ parents would reflect his _____. Where there is one _____ there is usually another. _____ means more people with _____ same occupation and similar _____. Their needs are classified _____ self-sufficiency, so everyone _____ with each other towards _____ common goal. Similarities bring _____ closer together, so their _____ and play are usually _____ and enjoyed with each _____. On the other hand, _____ person being brought up _____ a city deals with _____ in different occupations, because _____ city is a huge _____ of various industries and _____ in a businessman's world. A person's acquaintances will _____ made possible by his _____ profession. Rather than being _____ with one type of _____ he will be _____ to diverse fields in _____ working class, so socially _____ will be associating _____ a broad scope of _____. Their interests and goals will vary with their specific needs.

The above two paragraphs were taken from the first-draft essay of one of my students. With such a sample, the teacher or a peer-group can begin to point out problems with wordiness, vagueness, obscurity and broad generality. The topic was one of the student's own choosing (I refuse to take blame for such an old hack)--and she was committed enough to the idea to work through 4 drafts and 4 CLOZE exercises to a much improved product.